

BUG REPORT!

On call... to action! ISSUE 03





No matter how it's spelled, being on-call kinda sucks

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Bug Report! is a zine about our experiences as tech workers in a deeply broken industry. Many thanks to everyone who contributed content to this issue!

October 2019

Move Fast and Page the Oncall!

by Kelp

“Move fast and break things.” This is the Facebook motto that has echoed throughout the tech industry. Our services are structured to handle failure not as an *if*, but a *when*. And when a service goes down, the oncall is expected to swoop in and save the day.

In the tech industry, the oncall is a member of a team that owns a service (or several services) who is responsible for receiving pages when things break and fixing those issues ASAP during their shift. Some carry the pager around the clock, others during work hours. Some during weekdays, others over weekends as well. The responsibility is rotated between team members on a daily, weekly, or other agreed-upon cadence.

I’ve always found explaining oncall to people outside the tech industry to be awkward and embarrassing. “You know how doctors get paged when their patients are sick or bleeding? Well, it’s like that but our patients are computers and they’re bleeding... profits.” That usually elicits a half-sincere chuckle.

But among developers, mention of “oncall” nearly always elicits a groan. From the stress of triaging unpredictable issues to the monotony of repetitive maintenance tasks to the claustrophobia of staying within range of wifi access, oncall is one of the most dreaded responsibilities of software development.

During my tenure at Big Tech Company, I’ve noticed an interesting thing. Developers are (obviously) attracted to building shiny new features from scratch. But managers also goad developers into continuously delivering such features quickly, with as many bells and whistles as possible, because of how promotion processes are set up and because of how managers are evaluated. I’ve heard this termed “Promotion-Oriented Architecture”.

Managers often portray it as a tension between building new features and maintaining old ones. “Do you want to change the world or do you just want everything to run smoothly?” But who does this framing benefit?

Oncall time is stolen from our off-work time. Managers are fine with rough oncalls. “Take one for the team”, they say. It’s not like they need to carry the pager.

The worst oncall stories are from the teams that deliver new features continuously. They cut corners to meet deadlines, opting to support a feature through manual intervention (read: getting paged constantly at all hours to perform the same monotonous tasks), rather than taking an extra sprint or two to build out said feature. Or having to run through complex processes in the middle of the night because that’s when user activity is lowest. Even on teams that try to strike a good balance, it’s difficult to keep runbooks (documentation around how to triage and fix common operational issues of a service) up to date and understand every part of an ever-expanding system you’ve only partially helped build.

This isn’t sustainable.

For those of us with around-the-clock oncall shifts (Googlers, who get paid for oncall time, are the exception), oncall time is stolen from our off-work time. Your work, if you’re salaried, isn’t costing the company any more. Likewise, managers are fine with rough oncalls. “Take one for the team”, they say. “It’s the cost of innovation”, they say. It’s not like they need to carry the pager. So they don’t see the same trade-off between new features and sanity that we do.

Ultimately, “move fast and break things” translates to “build things as fast as you can and spend your off-work time supporting it”. Finding a sustainable development pace begins with talking with your teammates. “Do you feel like our operations load is sustainable?” “Why are you working on weekends? Do you see how that raises expectations for the rest of us?” “I saw that you stayed up late last night - why don’t we cover your oncall this morning.” It is through solidarity with our co-workers that we can start to change expectations around oncall and work in the tech industry and beyond.

Amazon Sucks

There was no playbook, no secondary, no training. I always got at least 4 pages a week. The work was unpaid, mandatory, and terrifying. That's what it was like to be oncall on a team that operated a backend at Amazon.

One of my most memorable experiences was being paged by an angry marketing team. They were complaining that some internet trolls had influenced a user-facing survey, and they needed me to track down the culprits ASAP. I was supposed to drop everything in order to find these users' IP addresses and as much personal information as I could dig up about them, including names and locations if I could get them. It sounded sketchy, but they told me they'd talked with the legal team and gotten approval for it.

I had never seen this service before. It had nothing to do with our team's mission. None of our docs, none of our code, not even any emails had mentioned it. I tried to tell them that they had the wrong team, but was soon corrected by my manager: "Actually, we own that service. It got pawned on us a year or two ago by team X after they lost their headcount."

I was told to start searching the logs to figure out whodunnit, but there wasn't anything in our server logs. Turns out the service wasn't even running on our servers, it was being run as part of some other team's binary. They didn't know anything about it and I didn't have access to their logs, so I was out of luck. Fortunately, I had access to the company's user action logs.

Side note: Don't trust Amazon with your personal data. Guess how many approvals it would take a random person to have complete access to the recent browsing history of every single user of the site? Zero. The logs team had given everyone in Amazon full access to the click logs of every customer, including IP addresses and some user-identifiable tracking info. This is not okay.

Anyway, that oncall ballooned into a huge project. It took about 3 weeks of back and forth with the marketing team until we found the fraudulent clickster. It was one of the people the survey was about. Shocker. During those 3 weeks, I had to learn several new technologies, create a database to

hold and analyze the data, and write a custom log parser to read the data in. I wasn't able to get any of my other work done. Afterward, my manager said "great job on that," which would have been nice if he didn't later mark me down on my performance review for not getting work done during those 3 weeks.

This wasn't even an unusual story. Later, I heard worse from some of my coworkers. One of them was roped into fixing another team's service during his oncall. The other team's manager claimed that they didn't have headcount to operate the service (a blatant lie), and said that if we wanted to keep on using it, we'd have to fix it ourselves. Our product depended on this service to keep operating, so this teammate was essentially forced to work for this other team because that team didn't want to own their own service.



What do these things have in common?

I'm told that after I left, it took our team 2 years to finally migrate off that service, and that the teammate essentially had to be oncall for it throughout.

I tried to tell other people on my team that it shouldn't be this way, but my manager didn't listen. The rest of the team acted detached, and wouldn't do anything about it. Later, when I was put on a Performance Improvement Plan for "acting like the sky was falling" (actual quote), I realized it was probably because they were terrified to bring up issues about oncall with management for fear of being reprimanded. I quit pretty soon after that.

Their money's worth more than your time

The first month I started working at this company, there was one particularly memorable night. It was shortly after I had just landed my first significant contribution, a process that allowed additional testing of code changes. That night, I was all alone in my apartment, getting stoned to celebrate (I was cool like that). Around 9 or 10, a coworker messaged me with a question about it. I panicked and scrambled to open my work laptop. I was so high, I was struggling to enable the VPN. This was the first big thing I'd done for the company, and my reaction was to do everything I could to appear responsible as a new hire.

After responding, I remember sitting on my couch wondering, Oh man, do I need to stop smoking weed for this job? Even in my youthful naivete, I had enough common sense to know the answer was fuck no. Since then, if someone messages me at that time of the night, I ignore them. There shouldn't be anything that's so important that it can't wait until tomorrow. I realized that if I didn't set boundaries around when I was available, I'd be at the beck and call of every other co-worker working late into the night.

There's just one exception to this: when you are oncall, it's not even a nice ping. An annoying robot voice calls your phone and spits gibberish at you about the latest trash fire.

D.A.R.E.[®]
TO RESIST ON-CALL

Developer Abuse Resistance Education

My first shift oncall there were six high fucking priority breakages (times when shit breaks hard enough for your phone to start ringing). I was paged in the middle of the night at least three separate nights. That Monday night, there was a 2am page, followed by a 7am page. After spending a groggy, stressful hour fixing the problem, I took a shower, went to work, and brought food to my desk to put out the next fire. Stuff was just broken broken broken. I remember feeling really exhilarated, thinking, Wow, this is so cool, so suspenseful. I'm doing really important stuff. That was back when I was -- not a bootlicker, but maybe a boot polisher. I would later realize that there was nothing "cool" about making a new hire deal with critical issues on less than a few hours of sleep. The excitement wore off when I found out that at minimum, we would be paged four or five times in the middle of the night during our week of oncall.

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About three months after I had joined the oncall rotation, our team had a meeting where we started working to address how unstable our production systems were. At some point, enough people had complained that management was clued in to the fact that our systems were so garbage it could actually risk harming our bottom line. We were told the meeting was to help make oncall less taxing for our team, but the real reason was likely that we were forced to run these systems into the ground, which had become a risk to the company. Long story short, over the course of a few months, people had to prioritize fixing the issues that were keeping us up at night, and we were able to make it somewhat better (but no surprise, it still sucked ass). Luckily for me, I got put in a different oncall rotation later on, which was much less intrusive. The old one is still chugging along, messing up my coworkers' nights, with seemingly no way out.

There's a tradeoff for fixing the root problems that make oncall hellish: devs need to stop working on their main projects. And while you can be rewarded for work that ultimately makes oncalls better, it's not rewarded nearly as much as performing more 'critical' (profitable) work.

So there's no incentive for an individual to fix the oncall system, and there never will be because if you try, your performance will tank. I was once punished in my performance review for 'not moving fast enough' (i.e., not taking enough risks). (The other reason was being overloaded with too much work.) I remember my manager telling me that three or four levels up the management chain, all people care about is that the feature you were working on gets completed. If it's a few weeks away from completion when the half ends, you get 0 credit.

This means that if you have to choose between making something 90% stable or taking an extra couple weeks to release it with 99% stability, you end up in a lose-lose situation. Taking your time hurts your performance review, and rushing means your team needs to fight fires in the future. So we are supposed to make things 90% complete to move faster. But when 10 different things are working 90% of the time, together they will work well 0% of the time.

So we have to suffer. We have to get paged at 2 o'clock in the morning, four nights in a row. We have to because it's cheaper for the company to make this a regular part of our lives than it is for them to hire enough people to actually do all the work they want us to do. And this company is fucking profitable. We could hire enough people.

So fuck them. Now I get fucked up when I'm oncall, drinking and smoking. They don't pay us extra for dealing with this stuff, so they are going to get what they pay for: an inattentive stoner, who will take my sweet time fixing their problems at night.

Welcome to the SoftCo family! As part of your new employee orientation we've created this fun and educational word search to help you remember our shared values!!! (Note: this is compulsory.)

T	N	I	S	R	V	M	C	O	R	G	I	S
E	T	J	B	N	E	E	V	G	Q	T	I	R
E	X	P	L	O	I	T	A	T	I	O	N	C
S	H	A	R	E	H	O	L	D	E	R	N	U
V	V	J	Y	E	U	C	U	W	Q	M	M	T
M	O	U	F	I	M	U	E	P	R	Z	S	E
O	V	U	N	P	A	I	D	F	F	A	Q	Z
W	E	R	C	S	U	P	P	R	E	S	S	U
N	R	E	Q	P	G	Q	P	X	Y	B	L	N
X	T	D	C	P	Q	B	T	D	H	V	U	I
K	I	I	N	N	O	V	A	T	I	V	E	O
I	M	M	H	B	A	Q	B	Y	F	E	W	N
X	E	F	H	Y	A	H	F	C	H	Y	Q	S

Take the words you found above and fill in the blanks! (Note: this is compulsory.)

_____ means you work _____
_____ to create _____
_____!

We pride ourselves on finding _____
ways to _____.

Never forget that here at SoftCo, we ___ you!

CALL TRANSCRIPT

Recording: Thank you for calling the KPMG professional and auditing services help desk. Our job is to resolve your management problems, guaranteed. Please stay on the line to be connected with the next available management engineer.

KPMG Rep (R): Thank you for calling KPMG this is Chad speaking. Who am I speaking with and from which company are you calling?

Jeff (J): This is Jeff from Amazon, and I hav-

R: Hi Jeff, is this for a new or existing ticket?

J: A new ticket, the probl-

R: Just a second please sir, while I create this ticket...okay, what can I help with?

J: It's my workers...they aren't working correctly.

R: Can you tell me a bit more about what they are supposed to be doing and what they aren't doing?

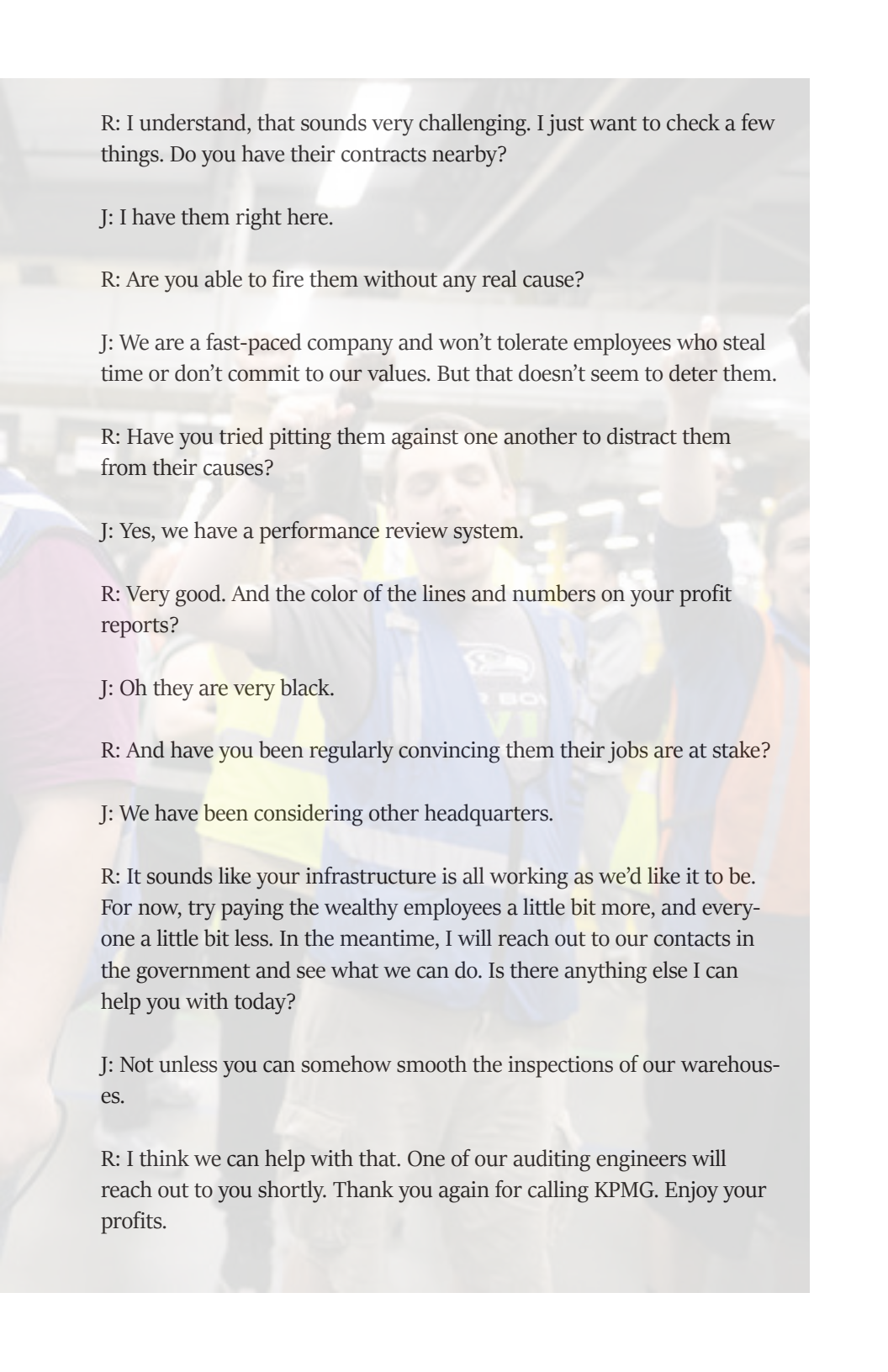
J: Well...I can't tell you in detail what they are supposed to be doing, I'm in a big picture sort of position.

R: Of course, sir.

J: But I know they aren't working hard enough, and they are asking for too much money AND healthcare.

R: And healthcare!? It definitely sounds like something is wrong. Have you tried doing a reorg?

J: Several times. It keeps them busy for a few months, but then they get right back to talking about unions.



R: I understand, that sounds very challenging. I just want to check a few things. Do you have their contracts nearby?

J: I have them right here.

R: Are you able to fire them without any real cause?

J: We are a fast-paced company and won't tolerate employees who steal time or don't commit to our values. But that doesn't seem to deter them.

R: Have you tried pitting them against one another to distract them from their causes?

J: Yes, we have a performance review system.

R: Very good. And the color of the lines and numbers on your profit reports?

J: Oh they are very black.

R: And have you been regularly convincing them their jobs are at stake?

J: We have been considering other headquarters.

R: It sounds like your infrastructure is all working as we'd like it to be. For now, try paying the wealthy employees a little bit more, and everyone a little bit less. In the meantime, I will reach out to our contacts in the government and see what we can do. Is there anything else I can help you with today?

J: Not unless you can somehow smooth the inspections of our warehouses.

R: I think we can help with that. One of our auditing engineers will reach out to you shortly. Thank you again for calling KPMG. Enjoy your profits.

An Empty Bed in the Global Market

by Beau Regards

I've never been on-call myself, but I can tell you what it does to a relationship. My partner and I moved to Seattle in 2012 when he was offered a job at Amazon. We knew that he'd have to be on-call as part of the position, but they offered relocation and it otherwise seemed like exactly what he had been hoping for. We'd been looking for opportunities to leave for a while. The culture where we grew up was fairly hostile to gay people and we'd been through a lot of abuse together. I was even dealing with homophobic harassment at my job after a coworker outed me. The company didn't seem to care, and there weren't any prospects for better jobs either. It was maybe a bit impulsive, but we decided to leave all of that behind and he took the offer.

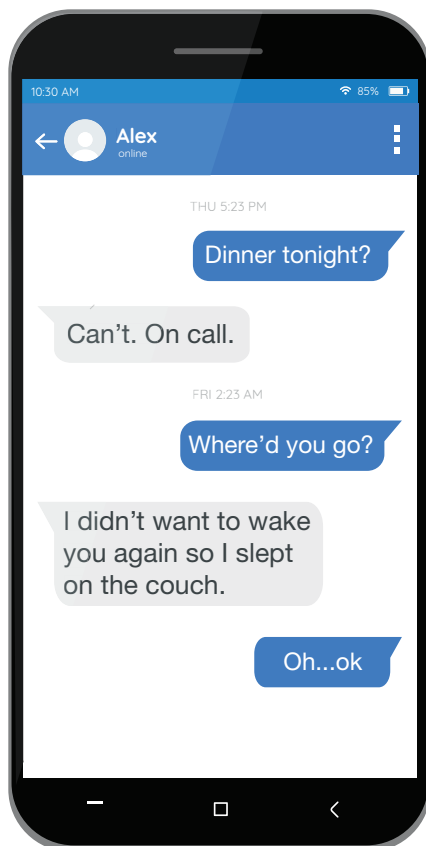
At first everything was pretty great, even after the stress of moving across the country. The trouble started when his turn in the on-call rotation came and with it that damn pager. This may not be the case anymore, but at the time they gave you a retro ass pager for being on-call. Not that surprising in retrospect, really, since Amazon is infamous for being cheap and even uses doors as desks like some kind of weird corporate fetishization of cheapness. In that first week of on-call, the pager went off several nights. Most of that was after we'd gone to sleep. If he didn't respond within a few minutes it would escalate to his manager, their director, and so on, meaning he had to get up to deal with it immediately. The issues tended to be complicated and require coordination with several people, so they were rarely resolved quickly.

Just because it was 2am in Seattle doesn't mean Amazon or its clients in Europe give a shit whether you're asleep or not. "Customer obsession" is a company motto after all and they had money to make in other time zones. Given that, the pager tended to go off later in the day when it was least convenient. It varied, but on average 5 to 6 times a week. Turns out you can't go out and do much when you might need to stop to respond to the pager at any moment. It could mean anything from having to leave a party or dinner suddenly to needing to pull over while driving and start working on

the side of the road. These conditions made it feel like during those weeks he was effectively working 24/7. Even when we tried to go out anyway he had to keep his laptop and pager chained to him the whole time which made him feel extremely embarrassed. Eventually we mostly gave up on having plans while he was on-call.

I think the company knew it was like this. At company parties they always had a large room set aside for people on-call and there were always several people in there. At Amazon this kind of severe inconvenience was just normal and therefore expected of you. The worst part was how often the pager went off after midnight. Usually it would wake me up too, but he tried as hard as he could to avoid that. Unfortunately that was nearly impossible. It would vibrate and make an incredibly shrill, loud noise like an alarm that was panic inducing if you'd been asleep. Sometimes we'd wake up thinking it'd gone off even when it hadn't. Even our cat was so bothered by it that he'd hide from it and it took a long time for him to calm back down to normal.

Eventually he started just sleeping on the couch when he was on-call. He felt bad about always waking me up and he often ended up needing to work for hours. I spent a lot of nights in bed alone after that. On some nights I woke up to see him still up and the glow of his laptop in the living room. I'd hear the tired, frustrated voices of him and other people on a teleconference call talking about whatever problem it was or waiting on somebody else to respond. I usually had to get up fairly early for work, but some weeks it



was so bad that he'd still be up when I left. It was all he could do to muster a smile when I kissed him goodbye because he'd been up most of the night and hadn't gotten proper sleep in days.

Over a year went by like this. We drifted apart. He switched to another team to change positions and be on-call less often, but with that came more overall responsibility. Even when he wasn't on-call he often still had to deal with work late into the evening as the project he was working on rolled out in Europe. We had a very small apartment and it was sometimes hard not to get on each other's nerves when we were always stressed and tired. Especially since by then our work schedules meant we weren't home and awake at the same time more than a couple of hours a day. If he was on-call we often didn't even get the weekends together.

That's what being on-call means for me. Waking up in an empty bed, the person I cared most about being miserable and exhausted, a dead social life, and a home that felt more like a workhouse. He thankfully doesn't work at Amazon anymore. We also aren't together anymore. We broke up right before he finally quit and took another job at a different company. I obviously can't blame Amazon or on-call work entirely for our relationship ending. Nothing is ever that simple. But the sheer misery, exhaustion, and separation it caused us was a bigger reason than any. It made everything so much harder than it ever needed to be. It wasn't even for anything important either. Just one of Amazon's many failed projects that nobody even remembers. I'll never forget what it cost us though.

How Being On-Call is Keeping Tech Male, White, and Young And How It Hurts Us

by Peter Benzoni

Picture a phone going off in the middle of dinner; its owner reaches out and asks what the problem is. “A moth flew into a relay, and fried a whole rack of servers.” (The moth in a relay bit is, by the way, the origin of the term *bug*—courtesy of Grace Hopper who invented COBOL, and arguably, the compiler). This poor sucker is now relegated to three hours of phone calls, frantic emails, and cursing at AWS. Their partner offers to clean up, wash dishes, help with homework, and put the kids to bed.

Now describe the sucker. Even with the interjection about Grace Hopper, I bet you pictured a white dude, and the numbers support that—tech is 69 percent white and 64 percent male. [1]

The greater the demands outside of normal work hours, the greater the gender and race disparity. Renowned (reviled) for its use (abuse) of long crunch times and on-call hours, the game development industry serves as an informative case study. According to Jamie Woodcock’s *Marx at the Arcade*, the UK videogame workforce is:

- 79% under 35
- 4.7% minority
- 14% identifying as women (who, it should be noted, earn 15% less than their male-identifying colleagues)

Why? Parents and other caretakers are already on-call, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Deployment is getting their kids to events on time. Bugs are usually of the stomach or throat variety. Status reports are checking in with your aging mother over dinner. Housekeeping is literal housekeeping. Despite great strides and the growing acceptance of stay-at-home dads, women still often bear the burden of keeping house, child-rearing, and other care work. (It should be noted that this work is often informal, unpaid, and underappreciated.)

The exclusion of parents and other caretakers is clearly visible in who tech hires—only young, unattached people have the free time mandated for on-call (and after hours) work:

- Millennials are hired 50% more often higher than other industries
- Gen X is hired 33% less than the average rate
- Baby boomers are 60% less than average

The calculus of how women get pushed out of tech is simple—there is reasonably affordable childcare available during working hours (like school or preschool), but after hours, short notice childcare is prohibitively expensive, both monetarily and in terms of stress. Combine these costs with gendered expectations and the wage gap, and more often than not, it's women who sacrifice their careers. Even without children, carrying the lion's share of household labor means they simply have less time and energy to be on-call, often resulting in burnout and leaving the field earlier than their male counterparts.

This scenario plays out thousands of times every year throughout the West. Indeed, this is exactly a close friend's parents' case—both her mother and father graduated with STEM degrees and went to work for the same tech company, where they have worked for more than 25 years since. However, her mother took summers off and refused to work evenings (including on-call) so she could care for the children. She faced stigmatization in the workplace for her choice to care for her children while her husband was sent to conferences, paid to participate in technical training workshops, and ultimately, promoted. Now, she is more than 4 rungs below her husband in the corporate ladder.

This effect only compounds with minority status and poverty. School is literally the only free childcare service, and in non-nuclear family structures, more common in both communities of color and poor families, care work often extends to the elderly as well. Thus being 'off-call' becomes even more essential than in the "Leave It To Beaver" nuclear family scenario that I originally laid out.

I don't want to discount the roles that tech's endemic racism, sexism and

ageism play, especially in the videogame industry—any wider push for labor justice must integrate intersectionality as a central tenet. That said, on-call work excluding women isn't just happening in tech. For example, medicine also requires significant on-call work and in 2010, almost 70 percent of doctors were men (though this percentage is dropping quickly) [2], with higher rates in professions that require multi-day on-call periods and long procedures like emergency physicians and cardiovascular disease specialists, who clock in at 76.5 and 89.2% male, respectively. [3]

Conversely, in fields with fewer expectations of being on-call, we see much greater gender parity, and in some cases women make up a significant majority. For example, 60% of US accountants [4] and about 2/3rds [5] of physical therapists are women. Clearly, stability and predictability in working hours create the kind of environment women (and parents of either gender) can thrive in.

Stopping the tyranny of the telephone will be difficult—we are made to think on-call work is a necessary evil and that there is no alternative, ignoring innovations like automatic rollbacks and the tried and true tactic of multiple redundant systems but I'll leave that deconstruction to another person or another day.

On a more personal and less sociological note, I've found that being on-call hurts my relationships with the people around me. As the child of (supportive and nurturing) parents who worked in on-call professions, it often hurt my relationship with them as they would have to miss events or work bizarre hours. In my own life and those around me, being on-call ended budding romantic relationships, caused numerous fights, and alienated myself and others from the people around them. Beyond that, being on-call can negatively impact sleep (just ask my dad!): half the time it's either a false alarm or there's nothing to be done right now, and frankly, it's fucking exhausting.

Ending, or at the very least, massively reducing the amount of on-call time is a necessary step if we are serious about making tech a friendlier place for women and people of color. And when we make the world better for the most marginalized among us, we make it better for ourselves.

Citations

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This issue of Bug Report! brought to you by the new iPhone 11 Pro...



Martyrs on Film: Learning to hate the #oncallselfie

by Alice Goldfuss

This is an edited excerpt from the 30 minute talk she gave at Monitorama in May 2017. The full version is available on Vimeo. It's really funny and smart! <https://vimeo.com/221050366>

I used to love getting paged. When I first went on-call, it was several years ago; I was put in charge of my company's local data center. By local data center, we meant two racks of servers that literally no one else cared about but me, but I was in charge of them. I was the parent of these little server babies. I felt so good about being on-call for them and getting paged because it was a sense of duty and responsibility, and I felt trusted and competent. I loved getting paged.

On-call helps with team bonding. You're in there looking at this horrific inferno with your coworkers by your side, trading off every week, and you come through understanding each other better and fostering a sense of community. It was this sense of community that led me to start a game. The rules were simple: every time you get paged, take a selfie and post it on Twitter with the hashtag #oncallselfie.

In the beginning, I was the only one playing. Slowly but surely, other people started to play, too. People who followed me on Twitter started posting on-call selfies, including a very early contender for perhaps the best on-call selfie of all time, the "restarting servers in my minivan selfie." Some key events happened to help pick up the pace. In early December 2016, PagerDuty added an integration into its app to take an on-call selfie, which was awesome because now people could take on-call selfies directly from the PagerDuty app. And people could complain about taking on-call selfies directly from the PagerDuty app. When they added that integration, you could see that more people started to participate.

As #oncallselfie grew in popularity, I continued to participate and post my own ... but eventually I stopped. It wasn't because I stopped getting paged. Oh, no, no. It was because I started to hate the #oncallselfie. I started to be ashamed whenever I posted one. That's because whenever I posted

an on-call selfie, this happened: “Why do you get paged so much? I hear it’s bad when you’re paged a lot. Seriously, how much do you get paged? Oh, you get paged a lot. Like way, way too much.”

This gave me pause. Isn’t getting paged what on-call’s all about? Stop me if I’m wrong, but we’ve all been here, preparing for on-call: You don’t leave the house unless you’re commuting to work. You clear all your non-work appointments. Can’t even meet someone for lunch ‘cause you might get paged. Cook all of your meals beforehand ‘cause you’re not gonna have time. Oh, but also have soup on hand in case the stress gets to your stomach and you can’t actually eat the food you prepared. Oh, and never, ever plan on getting sleep. That’s normal, right?

Ops has a military culture. I was milk fed on it. Perhaps so were many of you. We have all of these military terms to describe how we do things ‘cause it makes us feel cool. We’re not answering pages, we’re fighting fires. We don’t have an on-call kit, we have a “go bag.” Oh, and by the way, that really bad outage, yeah, that’s now a war story. We use these terms, and they make us feel important. They make us feel like we’re battling the fray. And I understand why. It’s exciting.

A few months ago, GitLab had a pretty big outage. They did something really interesting in that they actually put up a livestream so that people online could watch their engineers fixing the issue. People tuned in and people are still talking about it because it was super cool. It was exciting to be a part of that outage. It made you feel like a hero. For many ops professionals, that is the only time you get to feel like you’re a hero. Developers get to feel like heroes when they’re building things, but for many ops engineers, you only get to feel like a hero when you’re saving those things.... but that means we are always preparing for battle. Always.

When I was in film school, I had the absolute pleasure of being taught by a woman named Naomi Orwin. She was a screenwriter. Every time this amazing woman would sit there and look at freshman script after freshman script, she would say the same exact thing: “action scenes stop the plot.” Think about your favorite action movie. I like The Matrix, I like The Dark Knight.... Think about all of those action scenes, what they actually do to move the plot forward. Not the story, the plot.... Action scenes stop that plot.

Pages stop the plot of your career, and sometimes your life. If you’re trying to get a new job, what’s gonna look better on a resume? Building

things, fixing problems or three years of pages? Three years of fighting fires, that's gonna get you nowhere. If you're getting paged all the time, you're gonna miss your kid's birthday party, you're gonna miss hanging out with your friends, you're gonna miss sleep, and it's gonna impact your well-being. It stops the plot of your career and your life.

So where does that leave the #oncallselfie, though? If I'm here saying that people shouldn't be paged too often, doesn't that mean we shouldn't have the on-call selfie? Well, yes. But I like it. I like the on-call selfie. I think it's really cool. I want people to keep using it, at least for now, because I don't know if you noticed, but we're still human beings answering pages. Like it or not, someone out there is gonna get paged. I don't want them to get paged, but they're gonna get paged. When they do get paged, I want them to come online and find a community waiting for them.



malice ghoulpus @alicegoldfuss · 27 Mar 2018

All of my viral hashtags ([#oncallselfie](#), [#WITBragDay](#), [#unqualifiedfortech](#)) were created as coping mechanisms for pain, and watching companies try to own and profit off them pisses me off.



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The #oncallselfie has built a community. There are people from all over the world doing on-call selfies. That is the community I wanted in the first place. I wanted to be able to see people from different backgrounds, different experiences, different views on life all coming together around this shared frustration in our roles. That is what I have. If it wasn't for the on-call selfie, I would have burned out before I even knew I was on fire. That stupid hashtag was the monitoring system for my life and for my sanity. It really saved my career and my personal well-being. I hope it can do that for others, too. So, yes, please keep doing on-call selfies. You get paged, put 'em up there, participate in the hashtag. If you're not the person on-call that week, if you're not the person getting paged, please look through the hashtag, I do. Reach out to those people posting multiple selfies. Give 'em a tip of your hat. Tell them it's gonna be okay and ask them, "Why are you getting paged so much?"

BRO, DO YOU EVEN



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